

# HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION MEETING

**APPROVED** Minutes

March 18, 2021

## Meeting occurred via WebEx Teleconferencing

Chair Scott Markow called meeting to order at 7:02p.m.

**Commissioners Present:** Scott Markow, (Chair), Bianca Chang (Vice Chair), Joshua Kaufman (Correspondence Secretary), Mabrooka Chaudhry, Lynda Earle, Bob Ford, Peter Hwang, Joan Hash, Gabriel Terrasa, Kui Zhao and Jonathon Di Pietro (Student Commissioner).

**Absent:** None

**Staff Present:** Yolanda F. Sonnier (Executive Secretary) and Chaunta Taylor (Recording Secretary)

**Legal Counsel:** Melissa Goldmeier

**Public Attendees Present:** Kim Drake

### **I. PUBLIC FORUM**

Scott asked Chaunta if there was anyone present for the public forum, Chaunta replied, no one was present.

During the Chair's presentation Ms. Drake came in as attendee. Then dropped off prior to being presented for testimony.

### **II. APPROVAL OF FEBRUARY 23, 2021 MINUTES**

Kui made a motion to approve the February 23, 2021 minutes, and Josh second the motion. All Commissioners in attendance voted in favor of accepting the February 23, 2021 minutes, as distributed. The February 23, 2021 minutes were approved.

### **III. CHAIR'S REPORT – SCOTT**

Scott mentioned, the thank you letter was sent to Dr. Boston on February 24, 2021. On February 25<sup>th</sup> him and Kui presented the Human Rights Commission (HRC) presentation at the Black Excellence Expo. He also mentioned, on February 24<sup>th</sup> a statement from HRC was posted on the Office of Human Right and Equity (OHRE) social media and website condemning acts of vandalism on the Asian businesses. Scott mentioned, unfortunately Leslie Salgado -Tamayo has resigned as a member of the commission, the County Executive (CEX) will be sending her a thank you package for volunteering her services. Scott stated Leslie was a great addition to the commissioner and he thanked her for her service.

Scott mentioned since the letter was posted about the Asian vandalism we have had 3 other incidents. The first incident was on March 4<sup>th</sup> at the Racial Equity Task Force (RETF) meeting. A gentleman from the public made a 3 to 4-minute speech about Asian and Hispanic people that contained a lot of hate speech. It has since been condemned by Councilman Jones and his Assistant that was at the meeting. The AAPI held an emergency meeting to address the actions that took place during the meeting.

Yolanda mentioned that Councilman Jones and his Special Assistant, Mr. Harris were invited to AAPI emergency meeting to speak about the incident. After the Councilman and his Assistant left the meeting the workgroup discuss what further actions they wanted to take. Whether they would send a letter to CEX asking him to denounce hate and a letter to County Council about the racial representation of the members of the RETF. Additionally, there was a lot concern within the County on why the speaker was not censored, or his mic turned off. It was discussed that's not Mr. Harris role and every resident has the right to provide testimony during a government open meeting.

Scott mentioned the 2<sup>nd</sup> incident was a racial hate bias incident at Glenwood High School when someone spray painted over the word Black on a billboard that stated Black Lives Matter. The 3<sup>rd</sup> incident was March 17<sup>th</sup> the shootings in Atlanta at Asian own spa businesses. Scott stated that the hate incidents have gotten worst. Scott stated we can discuss how we as a commission should address these issues. Whether we do another statement or a letter to the editor. Scott deferred further discussion on this matter until the Hate Crimes Committee Report.

Scott then stated that Josh had something that he wished to share with the Commission. Josh stated although this is not an easy decision, he will be resigning from the Human Rights Commission. He mentioned how he admire all the work that we do as a commission but at this time with work and life balance it is best that he resigns at this time. The commissioners expressed their regrets that Josh was leaving but they understood and wished him well.

#### **IV. EXECUTIVE SECRETARY REPORT**

Yolanda mentioned starting next month she will resume giving a written report. Yolanda gave OHRE case statistic for month. The office has 43 cases, 26 are under investigation, 17 pending closure and 7 cases newly filed.

Yolanda mentioned we had 1 HBI incident for the month of February. A victim felt that the delivery driver had racial animus towards them because of their demeanor and condescending tone while talking. The next day, the victim noticed the dumpster had graffiti on it with obscene language and a swastika-type symbol.

Yolanda mentioned that OHRE currently has 3 vacancies, Administrator Tech/Paralegal, who support the investigators, Admin Aide, who is the Office Manager and the newly created position that would support Dr. Boston is assisting with the Equity work. Yolanda mentioned all the position close on March 19<sup>th</sup>, and if you know anyone that would be a good fit, please encourage them to apply.

Yolanda mentioned the Martin Luther King Commission (MLK) has a new Chair, Ms. Diane Marin, who is a retiree from the school system. The Vice Chair is Mr. Kurt Wall, a Sheriff in Howard County he was reappointed. Yolanda also mentioned, January 16, 2022 is the MLK Celebration and January 17, 2022 will be the Day of Service.

Bob mentioned that the LGBTQ workgroup had an 18 month term that will expire in April. The members are working on finalizing a letter at the next meeting to CEX to decide if in the future will they continue as a workgroup or as a commission.

Gab mentioned La Alianza Latina Workgroup has 3 main committee and they meet quarterly. The committees consist of addressing the Equity and Empowerment, addressing Health Issues and address Education within the Latino community. Gab mentioned he is on the Economic Equity and

Empowerment committee which are still in the beginning stages of finding resources and contacts. The committee meet between once to three times a month. He had no updates on the other two committee yet, he will have an update after the workgroup meets.

## **V. STUDENT REPORT**

Jonathon mentioned he met with HRC legislative committee on March 4<sup>th</sup> and the Hate Crime and Criminal Justice committee on March 15<sup>th</sup>. Jonathon mentioned over the past month he has conducted research on the reporting process of HCPSS for Hate Bias incidents and met with Dr. Kevin Gilbert the Director of Diversity Equity and Inclusion and Danielle Leuking with the Office of HCPSS General Counsel about the MPIA request. Jonathon mentioned during the meeting they discussed what training if any, that the HCPSS staff received on Hate Bias incidents. HCPSS does not use the term hate crimes to describe campus incidents and nor does it have a procedure internally for reporting. Dr. Gilbert offered to continue to meet with Jonathon to discuss further.

Scott asked Jonathon if he heard anything on how the incident at Glenwood High School was being addressed? Jonathon responded, the police were contacted, and the incident was classified as a hate crime. The Board of Education and Superintendent put out statements condemning the incident.

Lynda asked who classified the incident at Glenwood High School as a hate crime. Jonathon responded, the police department.

## **VI. COMMITTEE REPORTS**

### **a. Nominating:**

Peter discussed that currently we have 2 open commissioner positions. Peter mentioned that he accepted the Chair position on the committee. Peter explained that the committee has a timeline that they will follow to conduct the interviews and recommendation to submit to the County Executive (CEX). Peter asked if the vacancies had been posted. Chaunta answered not yet because we are still waiting for CEX's final review. Peter explained he will go over the committee timeline which is now subject to change upon CEX review. Peter stated that there are two options – for the nominating committee to present candidates to the full commission for a vote or for the commission to delegate the decision to the nominating committee. Peter stated that, due to time constraints, the committee may have to go with a latter recommendation instead of putting the recommendations to a vote of all commissioners.

Scott noted that he thought the latter process would be reasonable due to the fact that the recommendation deadline to CEX is May 9, 2021. Scott asked if that date is set in stone due to not knowing when the open positions will be posted? Scott mentioned if the timeline is moved to be after the HRC May meeting then we could put the decision on nominations to a full commission vote. If not, we should proceed with allowing the nominating committee to make the recommendations to the CEX.

Scott asked Peter what about reconsidering previous candidates that were recommended to CEX? Peter responded he would not preclude people applying again. Peter stated he would rather wait to see how many applicants we receive. If we do not get a lot of applicants, then we can go back and review and reach out to previous candidates that were recommended and ask if they are still interested.

Scott asked if Chaunta or Yolanda could contact CEX about flexibility on the recommendation date since the press release has not been posted? Chaunta responded she would contact Kim Pruim and inform the nomination committee and cc: Scott on her response.

Jonathon stated he saw that it was posted on the website and he will be applying for one of the commissioner positions. Chaunta explained yes, she's aware and she posted it. However, she needed to follow up with Kim to see if we can keep it posted on the HRC webpage if it has not been released.

**b. Legislation:**

Scott mentioned that the committee had their first meeting and he was elected Chair. Scott stated how Jonathon has been doing a great job and put together the written report. Scott encouraged the commissioners to read through the report. Scott mentioned that a Bill was introduced at the County level to make single restrooms available to everyone regardless of their gender/gender identity. Scott also mentioned on the Federal level that the COVID 19 Relief rescue plan was passed. Scott mentioned, that committee will report on the County legislation every month and State legislation every month that they are in session, and federal legislation every other month. Federal legislation will focus on the subject matter areas of the three HRC ad hoc committees.

Jonathon mentioned that Friday marks the cross over period for the general assembly. If a Bill doesn't make it in by Friday it will not pass in this session.

**c. Awards:**

Lynda mentioned she will be serving as Chair this year and that she, Gab, and Bianca met on Monday, March 15<sup>th</sup>. Lynda thanked them for their support and suggestions. Lynda discussed the timeline of getting award process started. Lynda stated that they will check with CEX on October dates to avoid conflict. Lynda noted one of her concerns was if they will have the ceremony in person or virtual. Lynda stated that she will be contacting schools to find a singer or band.

Gab discussed shared a story and discussed why he thought we should name an HRC award after Mr. Murry Simon.

Joshua stated he would strongly recommend Mr. Murray as well.

Lynda noted that the committee will do a little more research prior to choosing nominees this year. Lynda also mentioned that previously discussed was naming an award after Mr. Jim Henson.

Bianca stated Lynda is doing a great job. Lynda mentioned next steps will be to talk with OHRE about HRC budget and how they office could assist.

Scott mentioned that the commission should clear the name recommendation with CEX prior to the commission voting.

Yolanda asked are there any women tied to the County that the committee could consider as well. Lynda stated yes that could be discussed amongst the committee. Yolanda stated she will present the two names to the CEX, Yolanda suggested that her and Lynda discuss it further offline.

Bob stated he would like to recommend Ms. Colette Roberts, the founder of PFLAG in Howard County and a former recipient that received an HRC award.

**d. Outreach:**

Mabrooka mentioned that she and Kui spoke on March 10, 2021 and discussed their priorities. Mabrooka mentioned they also discussed continuing to maintain the annual report. Mabrooka reminded the commissioners to send her an email about events that they attend

Mabrooka mentioned the AAPI Workgroup held an unscheduled meeting due to the incident at the Racial Equity Task Force. Mabrooka was unable to attend due to teaching a class at that time. Mabrooka discussed what she was privy to in the meeting and it's included in her report. Mabrooka mentioned that two motions were made at the meeting. The first motion was to accept Mr. Jones' and Mr. Harris' testimony. Mabrooka mentioned she abstained from the vote during on the first motion because she was not present during their testimony. The second motion was to ask County Council to diversify the makeup of the Equity Task Force. It was a recommendation and that motion did pass.

Kui mentioned after the meeting the Chinese organization had some concerns. The incident that happened during the Lunar New Year have now been classified as Hate Crimes.

Joan asked Mabrooka what were her thoughts on the makeup of the people on the Task Force? Mabrooka responded she does not assume anyone's background or race based on their name. Mabrooka mentioned some members felt that the Task Force is not diverse enough as reflected within the community. Joan thanked Mabrooka for her clarification.

Yolanda asked Kui whether the group she mentioned was satisfied and does she know their further steps? Kui responded she did not know what steps they were planning to take if any because she does not follow that group. Yolanda thanked Kui.

**e. Social and Economic Justice:**

Kui mentioned she, Scott, Josh, and Bianca had a meeting on March 9, 2021 and during the meeting Kui was nominated as the committee Chair. The committee discussed what they will focus on for this calendar year. One of their focuses will be Housing and Kui mentioned she would invite the Housing Opportunities Master Plan Task Force to present at one of the HRC meetings. The committee will discuss renters' rights and how they can assist the homeless especially during COVID. Scott also mentioned that the committee will work with assisting with COVID Vaccine issues in the community.

Scott addressed the COVID vaccinations. He discovered a Facebook called Maryland Equity Vaccine Hunters and he reached out to them. The group help people who are in underserved communities. Scott stated in speaking with them they would love if HRC could assist them with outreach.

**f. Hate Crimes and Criminal Justice:**

Mabrooka mentioned that she, Lynda, Gab, and Jonathon met and discussed setting goals. Mabrooka mentioned everything she will discuss is listed in their written report. Mabrooka stated the committee with meet with OHRE to discuss HBI's incidents.

Scott asked whether the Commissioners would like to entertain a motion for the Hate Crime and Criminal Justice committee to draft a letter to the Editor on behalf of the Commision regarding the hate bias incidents mentioned during the Chair's report.

Peter made a motion to draft such a letter and Gab seconded the motion. The commissioners unanimously voted to approve drafting such a letter. Scott asked whether Mabrooka, as committee

chair, could draft the letter. Jonathon volunteered to assist with the letter. Mabrooka stated she will work on the first draft with Jonathon. Scott stated he will assist as well.

**g. Immigration:**

Joan mentioned that she, Bob, and Peter met and the committee voted her as the Chair. Joan mentioned the committee is aware on the limitations of how much work they can do based on last year. Joan stated that the committee will focus on three items: 1) Follow up with the CEX on the recommendation HRC made about adding immigration status as a protected class to the code; 2) follow up on the CEX's new policy at Jessup Denton Center about ICE and the detainees; 3) Look a little deeper in the IMG Report regarding the Jessup detention center. Joan mentioned that the committee may need assistance.

Peter mentioned the time it took to investigate and compile the report last year. Peter stated hopefully they can avoid how long it took to get back with the Coalition. Peter stated last committee they had four members and now they only have three committee members. Peter stated that the committee discussed asking other commissioners for assistance.

**VII. NEW BUSINESS/ANNOUNCEMENTS**

Scott mentioned that electing a new Correspondence Secretary will be tabled to next month.

Yolanda mentioned that the County has rolled out a new website. Expect to see new design and we will ask for suggestions. Scott stated he would like to be involved with the HRC webpage. Jonathon stated he is also interested in being involved. Kui stated add her to the list too.

Gab ask about the Correspondence Secretary position protocol, was that completed? Scott replied yes it was completed and discussed the protocol for that position. Gab thanked Scott for the clarification.

**VIII. CLOSED SESSION**

No cases up for discussion

**IX. ADJOURNMENT**

Motion to adjourn the meeting made by Bob and 2<sup>nd</sup> by Gab. All Commissioner voted in favor meeting adjourned.

Meeting Adjourned at 8:39 pm.